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December 10, 2003

Eddy R. Badrina
Associate, Investment Development and Economic Growth
Overseas Private Investment Corporation
1100 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20527

Dear Mr. Badrina:

It was a pleasure to meet you and to talk with you yesterday about the current status of the Executive Order on the White House Initiative on AAPIs (the Initiative). I am writing to follow up on our meeting, as well as my November 4th letter to the President, and September 26th letter to Secretary Thompson, on this matter. I want to reiterate my concerns about the proposed relocation of the Initiative from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Commerce, and any limiting focus of the Executive Order to business and economic development issues.

As you know, the Initiative was originally established by President Clinton in 1999, in order to advise the President, through the Secretary of Health and Human Services, on the three mandates of the Executive Order: To develop, monitor and coordinate federal efforts to improve Asian American and Pacific Islander participation in government programs; to foster research and data collection for Asian American and Pacific Islander populations and sub-populations; and to increase public and private sector and community involvement in improving the health and well-being of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Additionally, in its Interim Report to the President in January of 2001, the Initiative reported its decision to focus on five cross-cutting issues:

- Improving data collection, analysis and dissemination for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders;
- Ensuring access, especially linguistic access and cultural competence, for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders;
- Protecting civil rights and equal opportunity for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders;
- Strengthening and sustaining Asian American and Pacific Islander community capacity;
- and recognizing and including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in federal programs and services.

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By proposing to relocate the Initiative to Commerce, and refocusing its work primarily on business and economic development, the Administration has left the impression that these above matters are not among its priorities. I understand the Commerce Department's jurisdictional focus on the business needs of the community is important to the AAPI community, but I am concerned that Commerce's focus would fall short of meeting the other fundamental needs of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, as identified by the Initiative.

My understanding is that the Initiative has been working for the past couple of years on AAPI health issues. However, I have yet to see a report or any deliverable. Before the Initiative is moved to another department, I would hope these much-documented health disparities within the AAPI community would be addressed and the work completed to date is not foregone.

Additionally, the Initiative was created in order to address the two primary barriers to access and participation for AAPIs -- the lack of linguistic access and cultural competence in federal government programs. The Department of Health and Human Services has a long history of work on cultural competence, including the creation of national standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS). Few other federal agencies, including the Department of Commerce, have focused on the need for the cultural competence. HHS also has a strong infrastructure for addressing minority health issues and health disparities.

Furthermore, I have concerns on the funding and infrastructure at the Department of Commerce. The long term sustainability and stability of the office for the Initiative is critical. I have been informed that the Department of Health and Human Services has a much stronger budget and capacity to house the Initiative in the long-term. I would appreciate more information about any plans for a long-term commitment at Commerce that would sustain and stabilize the office and the Initiative's broad mission.

Finally, the Interim Report to the President in January 2001 listed numerous challenges faced by Commerce, including no needs assessments, reports or other documents in the past five years to identify, quantify or evaluate AAPI service needs; no regulations, policies or guidance on compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act for Limited English Proficient; and no grant programs or performance measure specifically for AAPIs. The 2002-2003 Agency Plan for the Department of Commerce did not address how the Department plans to institutionalize an agency wide mechanism to address AAPI issues. I am concerned there will not be adequate support for a government wide initiative to address AAPI needs without a department wide mechanism in place.

I appreciate any efforts of the Administration to prioritize issues affecting Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. I was relieved to learn when we met yesterday that the Administration has not made a final decision on the relocation of the Commission, and am heartened to know of the plans to fully solicit input from a broad spectrum of the community on this matter. I urge you to retain the Initiative at the Department of Health and Human Services and ensure that the substantive work of the Commission is carried out.

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Thank you for your serious consideration of this matter, and for your efforts on behalf of the AAPI community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael M. Honda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Mike Honda
Member of Congress